THORWALDSEN'S LIFE—SKETCHED BY H. E. ANDERSEN.

DERIVED FROM THORWALDSEN'S OWN ACCOUNTS.

THE life of Thorwaldsen unrolls one of the fairest pages of art's history, resembling the image of a triumphal procession, in which success and victory, and the full recognition of men, are blended in one fair *ensemble*. Such can be sketched either by words or forms. If we had to compass this biography within the limits of sculptured images, we would trace three distinct *medallions*—one representing a dense Danish beech forest, where King Harold Hildetand (his rich hair encircled by a thick ring of gold) receives the prophetic *omen*, that one of his grandchildren would reign from south to north, and his name be recorded in the annals of men—which, in fine, has been accomplished in the domain of art, in the general homage paid to the Danish sculptor. The intermediate medallion would represent Oluf Pau, a mighty Danish chief, whose art-taste is even praised in the songs of ancient northern bards.—Through the long lapse of generations, features and usages of men are often preserved and refulgent, and thus the mind of Oluf Pau seems to have been inherited and potentized in Bertel Thorwaldsen. And thus, we stand at the portal of a biography—whose inscription is art and complete success.

It was on the 19th November, 1770, that Bertel Thorwaldsen was born, in little Green-street, Copenhagen, not far from the Royal Academy. His father exercised the calling of a form-cutter in wood, his mother was the daughter of a parson, and the family had come from poetic Iceland; all which had its due influence on the rising thoughts and propensities of the future sculptor. The first thing however, by which the active mind of Bertel was excited, was a rather trivial subject—we mean his mother's spinning-wheel. The Danish poet depicts, with his usual vivid colour, a scene, when the little child did not rest, until (one fine moonlight night) he had a trial at this, to him, mystical machine. A few years since, only, yet lived an old ship's carpenter, who recollected the blue-eyed, fair-looking boy, who came to his father in the carving house, at the wharfs of Copenhagen, to learn the trade. But the intelligent parent felt, from his own deficiency, the great importance of drawing, and thus the lad was sent, at the age of eleven, to the *free-school* of the Art-Academy; and in two years had made such progress, that he could not only assist his father, but even correct his rough and unwrought forms. Thus, Thorwalsden's first works were the figure-heads of Danish galleons—"the ever-moving sea baptized them with its brine-waters, and a wreath of Oceanic plants was playing about them." Thus, Bertel remained six years in the free-school of the Royal Academy, mixed among the crowd of others, yet distinguished by his word-spare and intense application at the drawing-board, while his companions poured forth the poverty of their ideas in vain and idle gossip. But there was nothing severe or repulsive in this silence—mildness was in his looks; well-meaningness in his whole behaviour. When seventeen years old, he was confirmed, at which holy rite a curious incident occurred. There was nothing external to distinguish him from the other youths. But it had been stated in the papers, that the pupil Thorwaldsen had gained the small silver prize-medal at the academy, and so the dean asked him: "Is it your brother who won the prize?" to which the lad proudly replied: "It is myself." So, the Very Reverend looked at him pleasingly, and then called him *Mr. Thorwaldsen*. He often used to relate in after life, that this first title bestowed on his art, gave him more pleasure than all the distinctions, kings afterwards showered upon him.

At this time, Thorwaldsen lived in a little house in *Aabenraa*, the street which Holberg makes the abode of poor poets. The smaller gold medal of the R.A. was to be won by a pupil in sculpture—the subject, "Heliodorus expelled the Temple." It was in the Royal Palace of Charlottenburg, in a small chamber, where Thorwaldsen worked at his sketch;—but seized once by the mistrust in himself and apprehension (often the concomitant of true and sincere talent), he left his work in despair, resolved no more to return to it. "But in the life of a man of genius nothing is adventitious—the apparent trifle, the leading hand of a higher divinity." On one of the small stairs in the rear of this house, he was met by one of the professors, who speaks to him, examines him closely, admonishes him to *return*. He does so; and in *four hours* the sketch is done, and the medal won (15th August, 1791). Count Reventlow, Secretary of State, saw this work, and became Thorwaldsen's patron; he procured him employment, and put his name at the head of a subscription for procuring the young man leisure for his studies. In two years more, the large gold medal was won, and thereby a *travelling pension*. But Thorwaldsen very properly decided on going *to school* for the next year, and to acquire some of those literary attainments indispensible to an artist. His leisure time, especially the evenings, he passed convivially with men like Rahbek and Steffens, both, as himself, renowned in after life. At this period, a dog also was his constant companion, to be mentioned on the account of Thorwaldsen having preserved his memory in a marble statue.

It was in the year 1796, that he started for Rome in the frigate *Thetis*, R.N., which parting was painful on his side, as he loved then a beautiful girl. He did not see her again till many years afterwards—he, the first artist of the land, she a widow. But when the almost royal pageant of his funeral passed the streets of Copenhagen, an old lady of the tradesman's class was seen sobbing bitterly at an open window. This was *she*.

In those war-times, the voyage was a very adventurous one, the *Thetis* touching Algiers, Malta, Tripoli, and Palermo—all which scenery and imagery imparted expansion to the young artist's mind. Thus, in February, 1797, he landed at Naples. Alone, without a friend, not knowing the language, despair nearly seized him, and he sought for a ship to return home!—but he persevered, and arrived on the 8th of March at Rome, a day celebrated (wrongly), for a long time, as his birthday. Thorwaldsen had been introduced to the Danish art-critic *Zoega*—who, however, thought him possessed only (like himself) of ordinary talent. Even after three years acquaintance, Zoega still said: "There is much to be blamed—little to be praised; and he is not even industrious." Still, this was the time of which Thorwaldsen said afterwards: "That the ice was melting before my eyes." It was especially Carsten's drawings which much illumined the young sculptor's mind. But his little *atelier* resembled often a battle-field—full of broken and scattered bodies and limbs. His inspirations came often at night, and then he modestly and strivingly destroyed again in the morning, works which would not bear the inspection of the great luminary of day.

Three years had thus elapsed, and *nothing* had been done; the period of departure approached, and the reproach; "That he had absolutely wasted his time in Rome," heavily preyed upon Thorwaldsen. In despair, he modelled "Jason *winning* the golden fleece." There stood the figure modelled in clay—many *gazed* at it—indifferently, and Thorwaldsen smashed it to pieces. He had in April, 1801, to return with Zoega home; but accidents delayed it until autumn. Still, Jason had taken hold of his whole soul; a new, a larger statue of the hero was formed—"an immortal work." But it was not until the crowd began to say: "Here is something more than usual," that he took confidence in himself; and then came Canova, at that time in the prime of fame, and said: "This work of the Danish youngster is made in a novel and grand style." This made Zoega *smile*; he ought rather to have repented.—The greatest aid, however, came to Thorwaldsen from the Danish poetess, *Friedrike Brun*, who not only eulogised Jason in rhyme, but gave the young sculptor (without funds then), money, to have his work moulded in plaster of Paris." Still, the trunk was packed, the last goblet of wine drunk at the parting feast—the vetturino at the door at dawn of day. But another *accident* (?) happened, and Thorwaldsen had to stop one day longer at Rome—but this day *decided a life*. At that period Great Britain had battered down the Danish capital, despoiled it of its fleet—but it was a Briton also, who was instrumental in making the Danish name triumphant in art. His name is *Thomas Hope*. The footman in the hotel had told him, that Canova had spoken of *Jason*, as 'Una opera grandiosa,' and thus Hope came to the lumber atelier, which Thorwaldsen was about to leave for ever. The hero was unveiled, and Hope agreed to give 500 zechines for a copy in marble, although Thorwaldsen had only asked 600. However, by some reason or other, Mr. Hope had to wait twenty-five years for his marble statue—still, Thorwaldsen was *now* a man of fame.

But on thus becoming the favoured of fate, his mind was at times sombre, nay *more* than that. The sun of Naples could not cure him—but finally this was done by friendship and fostering care in the fine Villa Montenero, near Leghorn, belonging to Baron Schubart, Danish Chargé d'Affaires in Tuscany. There, health returned to his veins, quiet in the mind, and thus his villaggiatura at Montenero is portrayed (and recorded for history) in the two basso-relievos: summer and autumn. Nobles and artists surrounded him here, recognition and admiration on all sides. *The Dance of the Muses*, also, was here carried out in marble—as well as *Amor and Psyche*. That group stood fully completed in the château; a hurricane rises, the lightning strikes and smashes all other figures—save Amor and Psyche. There was some omen in this! Equally favouring was the sea on another occasion—his *Venus with the apple* was saved unscathed from out of the waves, after the news of the wreck of the vessel had arrived in England, where it was destined to come. Rich years of worthy works now rolled on—orders for the royal palace of Copenhagen, the town-hall, &c. Norway being then united with Denmark, the present king (then Prince Christian), wrote in 1811, to Thorwaldsen, that a quarry of white marble had been discovered in the former country, and invited him to come and to "shape the sturdy rock into breathing form, and to pour life-like appearance into its veins." But an important work at Rome came to prevent him for a while—the intended imperial palace for Napoleon on the Quirinal Mount. There were several rooms, where, on all four walls, ample, and as it were, an especial space had been left for basso-relievos; but none thought of the Danish sculptor—about to proceed to his native home. Time pressed on, not a day was to be lost, as the emperor was expected to arrive in May following. In this position[*] things the architect, Mr. Stern, who conducted the whole construction, chanced to sit next to Thorwaldsen in the academy of St. Luca—and made him the extempore proposal, to make a frieze of plaster of Paris, *twenty-nine* Danish yards long. But the condition was, that the work was to be finished in three months!! The man kept his word—and '*the triumphal march of Alexander*' issued from his atelier."

The fame of this work spread over all Europe—in Denmark it rose to enthusiasm. A public subscription was made to obtain a copy in marble: it was ordered by Government.

Thus Thorwaldsen remained in Rome. But another syncope of inactivity (the last, after all), broke over him. Drowned in an unexplained melancholy, he walked about, a shadow of his former times. "In the morn of a splendid hesperian day, after a night spent without sleep, he sat himself instinctively before his wood-frame, placed the wet clay over it, and in an instant his famous basso-relievo, '*The Night*,' was struck out. And as he worked at this inspiration, the dark mist of his mind vanished away; it became day-clear—sun-refulgent day; a joyous serenity, which never afterwards left him." During the course of that day, a Danish friend found him cheerfully playing with his dog and cat (Thorwaldsen being very fond of these *beings*) before the completed relievo. On the same day the moulder came to take it away with him to his workshop; but then Thorwaldsen had already worked, or rather *sorcerred*, at his "Day," and said to him, "Wait a little, then both can be moulded together." Thus in one day two immortal works were completed.

[Here *Andersen* concludes the narrative of the art's-apprenticeship of his late friend—that period most instructive and stirring for the art-student;—the after events of Thorwaldsen's life being sufficiently recorded in the current works of biography.]

[*] Of this stupendous scroll of bas-relievos, three copies were subsequently made, besides the Quirinal sketch. The Romanzira one—the Quirinal corrected and completed—and that for the Christiansborg Palace at Copenhagen.

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